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Three Tiers of Tradition

by Mary Nell Caldwell
Home Economics Senior

*This bride wanted a different wedding cake —
and that's just what she got —*

MY WEDDING DAY was two weeks off and my head was buzzing with plans. The organist was practicing Lohengrin and the vocalist was singing "I Love Thee, Dear" and "O Perfect Love." The florist had been contacted and my order for a white orchid, a bouquet of Esther Reed daisies, two purple orchid corsages and a dozen boutonnieres had been placed. My portrait had been made.

My parents had moved to California from the middlewest while I was in college. The realization that my high school and college friends would not be with me on my happiest day was a sad note. As I thought of this, I suddenly felt that this could be any ordinary wedding. As it was planned it just followed the stereotype picture of the average wedding. It had no personality.

This feeling was intensified in the bakery shop. After looking at the wedding cake designs they all seemed to look alike. They were too fancy and elaborate with an assembly-line air about them.

There were tiers of frosting, roses and doves topped with a bride and groom and sugar bells. They were just another picture in the ordinary wedding which takes place all the time.

"Mom," I said in despair, "I'm discouraged. How can I make this my wedding? Can't I do something different?" She gave me the understanding smile that only a mother gives. As she sat down, she began relating the story of her wedding cake.

My grandmother had been thrilled with the prospect of a wedding in the family. After meeting my father she visited the town's blacksmith and ordered a special cake pan. When completed two months later, it was a tube pan, twenty inches in diameter, made of dark tin, and had heavy welded seams. In the meantime, Grandmother, who was known in the Missouri community for her fine cakes, began filing through her recipes and eventually decided upon a light fruit cake which was a favorite of the family. Grandmother died three months before the wedding

The third tier of tradition was added to this wedding cake last year.



was to take place. However, her cake had become such an important part of the wedding plans that Mom baked and decorated it herself.

Traditionally, a fruit cake served at a wedding is known as the Groom's Cake and is in addition to the wedding cake. Each guest is given a small piece in a fancy box to put under his pillow and dream on. My heart beat faster as I realized that this was what I wanted. I had found a family tradition that would keep my wedding from being just an ordinary wedding.

"Do you still have your pan?" I asked doubtfully as I remembered the many things that had been discarded before the westward move.

"It might be in the attic," she replied, sounding less doubtful.

I rushed to the attic and began rummaging through boxes. An hour later I found it and also a smaller one of similar material and construction. Mom explained that the smaller one had belonged to a great-aunt. It was over a hundred years old and had also been used to bake a wedding cake. It was perfect for the second tier. I needed something for the top tier and my contribution to this traditional family pyramid was a one-pound coffee can. What is more indicative of today's modern bride.

Mom found her original fruit cake recipe and a week before the big day she began baking my cake. It took three days: one day each for the lower and middle tiers and a third for the top tier plus some smaller tea cakes used for a trousseau tea. The batter was rich and light colored with an abundance of fruits—white raisins, figs, coconut, pineapple, citron, and almonds. Due to the heaviness of the mixture, the lower tier required four hours of baking at a low temperature.

Two days before the wedding I began frosting the cake. I first put a thin syrup glaze on each layer separately to prevent crumbs from mixing with the final frosting. A heavier base coat was applied next. This was very slick in appearance but covered the darker color of the cake. On the next day I applied the final frosting. It was a light fluffy mixture made with white shortening to prevent drying. The only decorative trims on my masterpiece were dainty shell borders on the edge of each tier. Just before the reception I placed white rose buds on the cake. The top decoration was a lacey heart made by Dottie, my younger sister.

Now as I think of our family tradition, I wonder what my daughter will contribute—perhaps a small fruit juice can.



Max Caldwell gives his new bride a taste of her home-made wedding cake.

WEDDING FRUIT CAKE

3¾ cups cake flour, sifted	1 cup grated coconut
1 teaspoon baking powder	1 cup blanched almonds, finely chopped
1 cup white raisins	1¾ cups butter
1 cup white figs, chopped	2 cups sugar
1 cup crushed pineapple, drained	1¼ cups egg whites (about 10)
1 cup light citron	1 teaspoon white vanilla

Sift flour and baking powder. Combine fruits and nuts and add one-third of dry ingredients to fruit mixture. Mix well and set aside.

Cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add egg whites one at a time. Beat well after each addition.

Fold in dry ingredients. Add fruits and mix until well blended. Add vanilla. Pour batter into a greased 10" tube pan. Bake in a slow oven (250° F.) for two hours.

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